

## SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

I want to take a step back from this story for a moment. We've been reading these stories from John's Gospel for several weeks. We'll take a break next week to hear Matthew's story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his story of the Passion of Christ, but then we'll be right back to John to hear the story of Easter morning and the story of Thomas' confession as we head into the Easter season.

I'll give you a preview of what we'll hear in a few weeks. After Thomas sees the risen Lord, the narrator writes...

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

That certainly sounds like a concluding summary to why this whole Gospel was written. More was added to the story, but that doesn't change the way this story has been constructed, from start to finish, to lead to belief – to connect what was seen in the life of Jesus to believing in what God has done to save the world – and in that is life.

It was there from the very beginning – from **the** beginning:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. [the baptizing witness, not the writer] <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might **believe** through him.

Belief comes when we see what God is doing.

Phillip invited Nathaniel to "come and see."

Nicodemus was told what it took to see the kingdom of God.

The Samaritan woman told her neighbors to "Come and see this man who knew

everything.”

In the midst of these encounters where people see who Jesus is and what he can do, Jesus said “I am the light of the world.”

The whole story of the **life** of Jesus – as told in this Gospel – is building to this particular moment. The signs Jesus had been performing, beginning at the wedding in Cana were all put together in this particular book to help everyone **see** that this is the Messiah sent into the world.

This man whom Jesus loved, Lazarus had died, and in that death the true power of God is revealed – power over even death.

For Mary, for Martha, seeing is believing. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

And that becomes a present reality right there at the tomb as Jesus calls to him and Lazarus answers.

But the story isn’t over. Lazarus has come back to life, restored to his family and community. “Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.<sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.” John goes on to tell us. Once again, seeing is believing but seeing this power is also the climactic revelation of who God is that leads directly to the authorities deciding to arrest and kill him. They see something different than the disciples and the crowds. They see a threat to their power, to their existence.

That’s the dynamic encompassed by this gospel story. Who sees what and do they believe? Nicodemus couldn’t figure out what he was supposed to see but seemingly will believe later. The blind man had been healed and became a follower of the one who had given him sight. Phillip and Nathaneal believed simply because Jesus saw them and invited them. The Samaritans believed because they saw Jesus and he spoke to them.

Thomas will believe when he sees.

We believe, but what have we seen? We can see a well-crafted enactment of the gospel stories. We don’t see all this playing out in real time in the flesh. We have come so much later to this story that we can’t depend on what we see but depend instead on the witness of those who have seen. **We** are the purpose of John’s Gospel... “these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah”

So what do you see? When you hear these stories – and I know I just mixed our senses – do you see what God is doing? Do you see what God is asking us to believe? Do you see God revealed as the resurrection and the life that has the power over death?

The chief priests and the Pharisees saw what Jesus was doing and saw a threat to their status quo. They saw his refusal to conform to their view of the world and perceived that they had to do something to stop him. If they didn't act, they would lose their place of privilege and comfort, so they plot and scheme. They issue orders and threats. "Unbind him and let him go," spoken to a man who had been freed from death, reveals too much about who God really is and the power of the world pushes back.

The world has pushed back against what we have said about God. We say, "come and see" and reveal a love that God brings into the world – a love that is unconditional and filled with grace no matter what we have done and what we have experienced. Or at least we try to reveal that. It's not a message that is always welcome. The authorities of today want us to believe something else: the illusion that we earn our way on our own, the fallacy that we don't need anybody else, the falsehood that getting what we deserve is fair and just.

We figuratively stand in the tomb with Lazarus, waiting for Jesus to call us out of what binds us and find life again. Throughout the story of Jesus, we are invited to come and see and what we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is our life – abundant life, everlasting life. Right now. For you. Amen.